A Brief History of Elba Public Library

It was back in April 1936 that the members of the Elba Study Club first received the idea of a library for Elba. The Study Club took the library as a project and started with a book shower in the home of Mrs. Lamar Rainer. Each guest contributed a book, and a library was set up in the home of Mrs. J. F. Brunson.

September 14, 1936, the books were moved to the city hall with members of the Elba Study Club and the Three-In-One Study club serving as librarians for several months. In December 1936, the Elba Study Club secured an NYA project with one librarian.

In March 1937, the city of Elba bought a bankrupt stock of books in Montgomery. The city and the Elba Study Club combined their stocks of books, and the city granted the library space in the City Hall.

In December 1939, a WPA project was secured for the library with two librarians and two book binders. This project was discontinued in April 1943. After this, the library was financed entirely by the clubs, individuals, and the city. Under the new set up the library continued to grow and serve an ever-increasing number of patrons.

There were five original, local board members: Mrs. J. O. English, Chairman; Mrs. Sam Rowe; Mrs. Lamar Rainer; Mrs. M. A. Owen; Mrs. Hayward Taylor. They met the final Thursday in each month. Mrs. Glennie Rowe Smith became the librarian in 1944.

1953

The library won the distinction of being awarded the Thomas M. Owen Loving Cup of the Sixth District of Federated Clubs on two occasions for its outstanding work in Library Extension Service.

Report for fiscal year ending September 30, 1953, showed the number of volumes of books in the library to be 2954. This did not include the number of state books in the library. The total number of books loaned out to patrons during that year was 5440.

1957

In July, the Elba Public Library was brought up to date by labeling and classifying of books, creating a card file on all books. This was done by Mrs. George Johnson and a representative from the Regional Library. The Regional Service also contributed: children’s table and chairs, card catalogue cabinet, book truck and other tables. The Elba Public Library purchased a secretary’s chair for use by the librarian.

1958

In July 1958, four counties – Coffee, Geneva, Covington, and Crenshaw – merged and became Cross Trails Regional Library with headquarters in Opp, Alabama. For the first time, the Elba Study Club was relieved of its responsibility for financing the salary of the librarian.

From the Cross Trails Service, all books were available to the Elba Public Library on a lending basis to be kept as long as desired. Most juvenile books came from this source, which provided a larger variety for that age group.

1969

As of 1969, The Elba Public Library had an accession list of 4,583 books. These were acquired by the library through purchase or donation.

The Elba Study Club maintained a memory shelf in the library. Whenever a death of a member or member's family occurs, a book is added to this shelf in his/her memory. Other shelves and sections have been set aside in memory of individuals to whom books and reading were so important.

Summer months have afforded the greatest use of reading materials. In May 1969, the number of books checked out was 592; in June, 1112; in July, 1240; in August, 1107.

During the month of August 1969, the Elba Public Library enrolled sixteen children to take part in a reading program which was held in connection with Alabama's Sesquicentennial Celebration. On Friday, August 29, seven children met in the library and were asked if they would like to tell a story from a book they had read. Charles Ray, seven years old, told well the story of Helen Keller. They discussed other famous Alabama people of whom they were given pictures. The participants were Susan Powell, Jan Oglesby, Charles Ray, Susie Bruce, Lynn Hudson, Jamie Hudson, and Greg Oglesby. Each of these children who read 12 books during the month received a Certificate of Achievement, signed by Governor Albert Brewer.

On November 1, 1969, Mrs. Oswald Domling became the new librarian, after the retirement of Mrs. Glennie Rowe Smith. At that time, the library was in the Elba City Hall. All utilities were furnished by the city.

1990

Property for Elba Public Library building at 406 Simmons Street was donated by Fred and Charlotte Clark, after the flood of 1990.

1993

Cross Trails Regional Library Board of Trustees and the Elba Public Library joined forces to meet the needs of Elba patrons on March 15, 1993. This was

a joint effort between the State of Alabama and the libraries of Coffee, Covington, Crenshaw, and Geneva counties.

1997

September 16, 1997, the Elba Public Library petitioned Cross Trails Regional Library to dissolve its association. This was granted March 1998.

1999

In August 1999, a resolution was signed by the Coffee County Commission in agreement with the State of Alabama Public Library Service to provide state aid funds for Elba Public Library and Enterprise Library. The aid for Elba Public Library was based on the percentage of the 1990 county population that resided in the divisions of Elba, Jack, Kinston, and Victoria. All residents of Coffee County shall be entitled to free library service from the library.

2019-2020

Project: “Kidz Discovery Zone” was added to the library from a Strengthening Youth and Family Grant that current librarian, Jennifer Amlong, pursued. The goal of this project was to increase usage of the library by children and families by providing a space for them. It provides an inviting environment with places for families to read and learn together, interactive learning games, child safe computers, STEAM activities, space for children’s programming and an updated collection of books. In addition, a smart TV was added for use with children and adult programs.

2021

At her death on February 16, 2021, Mrs. Catherine Brunson Luening bequeathed through her will a generous sum of money to the Elba Public Library. (At the Elba Library’s start in 1936, Catherine’s mother, Mrs. J. F. Brunson originally housed the fledgling library in her home.) On June 26, 2021, Catherine Brunson Luening was recognized and remembered for her generosity at a reception held at the Elba Public Library. Many of her family members, nieces, and nephews, were able to attend. A former music student of Mrs. Luening provided a brief concert at the reception.

2022

June 26, 2022, the Charlotte Moates Clark Community Room was dedicated in her memory. Mrs. Clark had served on the Elba Library Board for 37 years.

2023

Patron requests for historical information created a need for easier and faster means of searching. As part of a Technology Grant, several purchases were made to enhance the Local History and Genealogy collection. Some of these included the Digitization of High-Demand Rare Library Materials, purchase of the following machines: for transferring materials from VHS to DVD, Thermal Binding equipment and materials, Canon TA-20 24” scanner and printer, 27” Minikote Roll Laminator, and VIISAN Large Format Flatbed Scanner.

These purchases have allowed the library to archive The Elba Clipper (local newspaper) from 1901-Present, most Elba High School Yearbooks from 1949-2021, most Zion Chapel High School Yearbooks from 1981-2012, and various articles related to Local History. The site for these is on the website https://archive.org/details/@elbalibrary.com

In November, the mural in Charlotte Clark Community Room was unveiled and enjoyed. Thanks to Dr. Mark Wilson and The Caroline Marshall Draughon Center for the Arts and Humanities in The College of Liberal Arts at Auburn University, the mural was mounted and presented. The student artists and Professor Wendy DesChene spent countless hours painting this mural with

pictures related to our beautiful city.

2024

Project: “Outdoor Musical Play and Learn Spaces” was added to the library site as well as Tiger Town Park (2 blocks from the library) by a grant. This includes in-ground musical instruments, weather resistant music books, storyboards, and signage. These Outdoor Musical Play and Learn Spaces draw people to the library by tying a vital city attraction (Tiger Town Park) to the library through wayfinding signage, and encourage library use by creating an attractive and fun space that draws community members to the library. These music spaces are available even when the library is closed.

2025

In addition to the “Outdoor Musical Play and Learn Space,” the library expands the use of its outdoor space to add a fenced area for “Outdoor Read, Learn and Play Garden.” This area serves as a versatile space for hosting outdoor programming suitable for all age groups. Fencing provides a secure environment for children. Users are able to play instruments, use play equipment and read stories. QR codes are placed at each station that direct users, who have devices, to stories being read on YouTube or other outlets. Being a permanent fixture, it will remain accessible to the community even during non-operational hours, fostering a continuous connection with the library.

An Accessibility Study was made of the library with help from Lucia Grantham family and friends. A test was done with a wheel chair to assure that all aisles were maneuverable. Hand-push buttons were installed for automatic door openers of both outside and inside doors.

Current programs available at the library as of this date include:

Pre-School Story time
Homeschool Hangout

Coffee, Coloring and More
Day and Evening Book Clubs
Make-it Mondays
Books on Wheels
Area Senior Centers
Area School visits

Services currently available:

FAX
Printing
Computers
Hot Spots
Scanning
Laminating
Notary

Compiled by Carolyn B. Hocutt, 2022-2025